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Interpreting contemporary vision and belief

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EDITORIAL

In this issue we have two examples of people who prefer superstition to science. Such people are not only the bane of ufology but they also operate in other fields, where the consequences of their actions are likely to be more serious, such as the investigation of allegations of child abuse involving Satanic rituals. What can be done about superstitious ufologists? Any suggestions?

IRRATIONAL UFOLOGISTS

Magonia reviews editor Peter Rogerson is greatly disturbed by recent book by Peter Hough, which consists of an uncritical rehash of old UFO incidents, followed by a few chapters on his investigations of alleged abductees. (1) Peter's strongly worded review is due to appear in the next issue (No .70) of *Magonia*. In it he deplores Hough's use of hypnotic regression on witnesses - with the assistance of psychologists - and his practice of reinforcing their fantasies instead of attempting to dispel them.

Hough's approach to the subject is clearly very similar - although different in style - to the thoughts and attitudes of Jacques Vallée, John Keel and Gordon Creighton. This is akin to the medieval and early modern beliefs in demons and witches, but having the important difference, as Peter Rogerson points out, that the modern victim of evil entities is seen as having no defence against them: 'Past societies may also have imagined themselves besieged by the forces of darkness, but they could put on the armour of faith, or work powerful magic, or use the burning glass of reason to dispel the night. Hough offers no such consolations . . . '

His book ends with the following words, which neatly express his irrational, paranoid approach to UFO experiences: 'They control our evolution, our religious and cultural beliefs, our environment, and our intellectual and personal freedom. The "aliens" can come and go with impunity. We are powerless to do anything about it. They can take people at will, and enter our dreams as easily as they invade our air space. They can mock us and hurt us, but they are not really cruel - just indifferent.

'Our destiny is in their hands.'

The kind of reasoning - if it can be called reasoning - used by Hough is also used by those who are following different agendas (see 'Satanism Update' below). Investigators who use techniques of close questioning and hypnotic regression always seem to elicit the responses that they expect, or hope for. Psychotherapists - amateur and professional - obsessed with the idea of Satanic abuse have caused no end of trouble; families have been torn apart and innocent persons have been given long prison sentences. Believers in reincarnation regress people until they 'remember' their past lives.

The activities of psychotherapists who cause people to 'remember' being victims of satanic abuse have been curbed to some extent by the formation of organisations dedicated to insisting that people must not be prosecuted for crimes they have not committed. Books have also been written by authors who have revealed the methods and motivations of these therapists, and have pointed to the lack of forensic evidence and the testimony of independent witnesses to support the allegations. Also, some therapists have been successfully sued for malpractice.

With ufology it is different, though. The alien abduction/demonic entities crowd can seemingly get away with anything. Demons and grey aliens are safely out of reach of the law, so the fantasies of these people have continued to escalate unhindered. Many of those ufologists who believe that all UFO experiences have rational explanations - physical or psychological - are partly to blame because of their indulgent attitude to the alien abduction enthusiasts. They should take a much harder line with such people.

Reference

1. Hough, Peter. *Visitation: The Certainty of Alien Activity*, London House, 1999

SATANISM UPDATE

It seems that those who believe that Satanic abuse is widespread and highly organised are not going to give up easily. On 9 February it was revealed that two psychiatrists, Valerie Sinason and Rob Hale, who were notable critics of Jean La Fontaines's official 1994 report which concluded that Satanic abuse stories were a myth, have been given a government grant of £22,000 to prepare a document on ritual abuse compiled from the reported experiences of their patients.

In *The Guardian* Valerie Sinason is reported as saying that '46 of her patients claimed to have witnessed murder of children or adults during ritual abuse ceremonies that had involved up to 300 people at a time'. (1) Her remarks were strongly criticised by Professor La Fontaine, who accused her of being 'out of her depth'.

A critical feature article in *The Sunday Telegraph* goes into considerably more detail. (2) Valerie Sinason is quoted as saying: 'Men and women worship Satan as their god in private houses or in churchyards or forests. They practise every sexual perversion that exists with animals, children and both sexes. They drink blood and urine and eat faeces and insects. They are involved in pornographic films and drug dealing as a means of raising money. They are highly organised, successful in their secrecy, and have the belief that through this pain and abuse they are getting closer to their god.'

Ms Sinason also alleges that children are raised specifically for sacrifices and that their births are not registered. She offers no evidence to support these fantastic allegations, apart from stories told to her by 'survivors'.

The apparent credulity of Sinason and Hale concerning stories of Satanic abuse echoes the findings of a working party set up by the British Psychological Society in 1994 under the direction of psychologist John Morton, which concluded that all was well with the psychiatric profession, as its members believed that the stories of Satanic abuse elicited by them were genuine.

In the 'Preface to the English [sic] Edition' of their book *Making Monsters*, a critical study of Satanic abuse claims, Ofshe and Watters comment: 'The results of the Morton group's survey and their willingness to conclude that all is well demonstrates that the leadership of the British psychological profession has a well functioning willingness to believe in fairy tales. Unfortunately, this healthy willingness is appropriate for children of about age 8 and utterly inappropriate for adults charged with a serious task.' (3)

References

1. Brindle, David. 'Satanic abuse row erupts', *The Guardian*, 10 February 2000
2. Palmer, Alasdair. 'Satanic abuse meets the mutant ninja turtles', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 2000
3. Ofshe, Richard and Watters, Ethan. *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy and Sexual Hysteria*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1995

LETTERS

I think you are right to choose a single case as the arena in which to challenge the ETH-believers to trial by combat; and right, too, to choose the Walton case, with its plausible protagonist and its cloud of supporting witnesses. If the true facts could be established in this case, it would be a valuable precedent for a great many others.

The starting-point, as your analysis makes clear, must be the alleged witnesses themselves. Apart from their stories, there is no case.

Which makes it, essentially, a study in human behaviour. Not necessarily behaviour as dissected in textbook or even clinical psychology, but the kind of behaviour which erupts into the headlines every week, in which an apparently normal person suddenly does abnormal things - shooting fellow-pupils or work colleagues, claiming a heavenly mandate to murder prostitutes or to run naked into a Catholic church wielding a samurai sword . . .

A number of people who undergo UFO-associated experiences behave in ways which most of us would think odd. Strieber is perhaps the extreme example, but from Corso with his claims to have saved civilisation to Tony Dodd with his proliferation of UFO sightings leading to his claim to be Britain's leading abduction investigator, there has been no lack of people behaving in ways which in any other walk of life would qualify them as suitable cases for treatment. It is possible, of course, that

this could be accounted for straightforwardly, as the consequence of their interaction with the aliens. But it could equally well be perceived as an indication that the individual was, from the outset, marching to the beat of a different drum from the rest of us.

For this reason, I think it could be helpful to consider the Walton case in relation to other cases where the protagonists have behaved very oddly. I have already raised in your pages the bizarre case of the Allagash abductions, where the multiple participation presents a parallel to the Walton case. The goings-on there were weird in the extreme: hardly anyone associated with the witnesses escaped, so that one might wonder if weirdness is a contagious affliction.

A different kind of parallel is presented by the Cergy-Pontoise abduction, in which Franck Fontaine was abducted, like Travis Walton, for a week, to return in quite similar circumstances. Many years later, Jean-Pierre Prevost, the most prominent of the three young men involved, confessed that it had been - as most researchers had always suspected - a hoax; but what is intriguing is that his two companions, Salomon N'Daye and the abductee Fontaine himself, have refused to go along with their companion's confession, insisting vigorously on the truth of the affair.

Easy to say they are lying, but why should they? What if they have come, by who can say what mysterious process, to sincerely believe everything really did take place just as they told police, press and researchers at the time? Believing so profoundly, that the pseudo-story is now implanted in their minds as reality?

Relevant in this context are those cases from the child-abuse field in which patients have been convinced by therapists that they were indeed guilty of abusing their children. You are doubtless familiar with the frightening case of Paul Ingram, currently in jail for abusing his daughters: almost certainly he did nothing of the kind, but was 'brainwashed' into the belief that he was really guilty. To test this, psychologist Richard Ofshe fabricated a fictitious incident which, a day later, Ingram was insisting had really happened.

What does this tell us? That a seemingly sane and healthy person can come to believe that s/he has truly undergone a totally fictitious experience, provided s/he is suitably conditioned and that the context and circumstances are appropriate.

One of the most memorable lessons in human behaviour I have ever had was when I was visited by an elderly New Zealander who showed me a fine colour photo he had taken of a UFO. He told me precisely when and where, and detailed the circumstances. It was all extremely plausible - except that I recognised the photo as one which had been taken by an American witness, some years previously. Yet I am convinced that my visitor had genuinely come to believe that he himself had taken that photo, building it into his own experiences. And of course, as we all have, I have been told dozens of stories by people who have consorted with extraterrestrials and even been aboard their space craft. It is possible that a few of them know they are fabricating, but I believe that the great majority have come to believe their fabrications to be real.

Consequently, when I find, say, Larry Warren telling us how aliens would come to his bedroom on a nightly basis, and how on his re-visit to Rendlesham he saw 20+ UFOs the first night, I do not necessarily jump to the conclusion that he is deliberately lying. On the other hand, I do wonder how much else of his book may be equally fictional? There are of course other reasons for questioning his version of what happened when he turned left at East Gate, but those two claims were, for me, all the danger signs I needed. Similarly, when Strieber first burst on the world with his personal account of his experiences, the history of his blackouts and other odd behaviours - even as reported by himself, let alone what he didn't tell us - warned us that nothing the man wrote could be taken at face value. I asked myself whether the fellow is a deliberate liar with a keen nose for what makes a best-seller, or whether he sincerely believes his own nonsense? I would like to believe the first, but reluctantly I have come to think that the latter is the more probable. At the same time, if I had for a moment been tempted to take his claims seriously, I would have been dissuaded from doing so by the proliferation of contradictions and inconsistencies in his story.

So how does all this relate to Walton? I think it means that we cannot rule out a scenario in which all concerned - or perhaps the most forceful of them, with the others tagging on (as I feel sure happened at Allagash) - reached a point where their story had become true, for them.

This is far from being an explanation, of course. It doesn't account for whatever event initially triggered the whole episode. But it does, I think, enable us to understand the subsequent behaviour of the witnesses. The updated *Fire in the Sky* reads as if the writer sincerely believes what he is saying. Well, maybe he really does.

Hilary Evans, London

I enjoy your magazine, and I have quoted from it in *Smear*. I especially like issue No. 22, where you mention *Smear* in the editorial. I don't really agree that *Smear* is more 'polemical' than *Monthly Supplement*. You seem to have a sharper edge to your criticisms, whereas I try to remain more light-hearted so as to be less offensive. Yet I agree with most of what you say, especially your remarks on the bottom half of page two of that issue, which I intend to quote.

I do not receive Andy Roberts's publication, and I wish someone would convince him to put us on his mailing list.

Keep your Eye on the Sky!

Jim Moseley, Key West, Florida

ODDS AND ENDS ==========

British ufology reborn yet again? Readers who are more interested in ufologists than in ufology and who enjoyed last year's saga of Mad Max and the Sheffield incident, and the resignations of prominent BUFORA members, will be delighted by recent developments in Britain. Tim Matthews and two others recently unsubscribed from the UFOIN mailing list shortly before being expelled from it. Matthews then announced the formation of a new group to be called the National UFO Research Association. There has already been some comment about some of the odd characters who have joined it, but its oddest feature appears to be its membership policy. UFO enthusiasts are welcome to pay their subscriptions for the newsletter and to pay for 'research', but they 'do not have voting rights, cannot sit on committees and cannot, by right, affect NUFORA policy', Matthews announced on the Internet. Who would want to join such an organisation? We cannot see it lasting very long.

Area 51. The magazine *Aircraft Illustrated* (March 2000) has begun a three-part feature on the mysterious Groom Lake facility in which a group of aircraft enthusiasts claim to have made a daylight sighting of a large, black triangular aircraft which they believe to be the successor to the SR-71 reconnaissance aircraft and to be responsible for the reports and rumours of a secret aircraft popularly called the 'Aurora'.

A pint of Crop Circle, please! An American brewing company called Crop Circle Beer, based in California, has ordered barley from a farmer at Alton Barnes, near Devizes, Wiltshire, and has stipulated that all of it must have been grown in fields with crop circles. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 14 February 2000)

Yeti captured in China. A group of peasants leading a strange, fur-covered creature - which they claimed to be a yeti - in chains through the streets of Xiangcheng in China's Henan province and asking passers-by for cash, were detained by police. They discovered that the 'yeti' was 'a diminutive villager named Fang Xiwang, or Hopeful Fang, dressed in black fur'. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 2000)

Silly names. One unfailing source of amusement at *Magonia* editorial meetings is all those funny names in the 'Director's Message' in *MUFON UFO Journal*. Of course, we British don't go in for silly names, or so I thought until I read in *The Daily Telegraph* (10 February 2000) of a man who wants his daughters to become pop stars, so he gave them distinctive names which came to him in dreams. So one is called Zanya Obea Fotherby and her sister is Zaedea 21a Fotherby, 'thought to be the only child in Britain with a number registered as part of her name'.

Well, they might not become pop stars but they should do well if they join MUFON.

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